Week ending Saturday May 29/1971

PARADE

7½p

Why Helen is a knockout in British boxing

Another great Picture Special inside

EXCLUSIVE DES O'CONNOR'S BIG GAMBLE

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PARADE PUB CRAWL

Do you wanna argue about it? Down at the Thomas A'Beckett they all agree . . .

SHE'S CHAMPION!

GO-GO girl Helen Reader is a knock-out! And you'd better believe it, because the guys who say so are surely the toughest collection of drinkin', fightin' men this side of Madison Square Garden, New York.

They are the pugilists past and present, professional, amateur or just plain fun-loving, who use London's famous Thomas A'Beckett pub in the Old Kent Road.

Our 'Enery Cooper used to train there . . . young boxing hopefuls still sweat and thump away in the gym above the Beckett's rambling bars . . . and 17-year-old Helen does a topless go-go dance there most Thursday evenings to ear-splitting musical accompaniment and a packed house.

She calls herself Smokey Joe on stage, but the fight-conscious Beckett regulars have changed the name a bit to—you've guessed it—Smokin' Joe.

You might find it hard to believe that patrons of a pub like the Beckett, 99 per cent veterans of battles either inside or outside the ring, could be won over by a slip of a go-go girl. And watching Helen, long dark hair tossed all ways in her frantic, sexy routine, you might likewise find it hard to believe that barely two years ago she was still a pupil at a convent high school in Southend, Essex.

But they are . . . and she was!

Instead of dancing up blood-pressures in a frilly, bikini-type costume with the top missing, she was sitting sedately at her desk in an all-concealing, very prim school uniform.

One of the convent teachers wrote of Helen on a term report . . . "She is a good influence in the form." Now she would be guilty of gross understatement if she said . . . "Helen's form has a big influence!"

Some of the Beckett regulars came up with their own observations on blue-eyed Helen's progress when PARADE looked in on her act.

"Very tasty," said 28-year-old Jim Thomson.

"I think this topless dancing is a lot more interesting than a girl who peels off completely and looks like a statue while she's doing it." Vince

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Guitar playing.....drumming.....

PARADE PUB CRAWL CONTINUED

Brazil, 33, never a pro. fighter, but who admits to doing a bit outside the ropes, commented: "These go-go girls are great and Helen is the greatest. She is like a breath of fresh air. Terrific."

Twenty-five-year-old Anthony Hart, six weeks married and proudly announcing that he's a father-to-be, reckoned Helen terrific, too. "She makes the drinks go down better," he added.

GO-GO-GIRLS

"If they didn't have go-go girls in here I'd use another pub."

Whether he was joking or not, it's unlikely he'll have to prove it. Licensee Beryl Cameron-Gibbons, only woman boxing promoter in Britain, promises go-go girls will remain a going concern at the Thomas A'Beckett.

But the pub itself, sadly, is unlikely to be standing for more than a few more years. It is on a site schemed as a recreation ground and in the near future all that will be left of the world-famous pub will be a plaque.

Most of the greats of the ring have passed through the Beckett's doors over the years and hundreds of photographs of fighters line the walls. There's a painting of Henry Cooper done by a Beckett customer and the gloves Henry wore when he dropped Cass Clay are on display in a glass-fronted case.

"It is sad the Beckett has got to come down," said Beryl. "People come here from all over the world—America, the Continent . . .

"Four Germans walked in once and said a friend back home had bet them they couldn't find the Thomas A'Beckett by name only. They just got into a cab when they arrived in London, asked for the Beckett, and the cabbie brought them."

But back to Helen and the go-go scene. "The customers like the go-go girls," Beryl said.

"The fighters in training never see them, because the go-go dancers don't start until 9 o'clock and by then the boxers have gone home.

"But among the regular customers, Helen is the most popular girl we've had.

"She's the prettiest—young and clean-looking. Even girls who come in like to watch her. Girls don't mind looking at topless dancers if their breasts are firm. They *don't* like it if they're floppy.

"Yes, topless dancers are all right. Though I'd never have a full stripper in the Beckett."

There's no doubt they like Helen at the Thomas A'Beckett. And there's no doubt either that Helen likes 'em at the Beckett.

"I *love* it down here," she said. "The crowd is absolutely smashing. The people are all genuine . . . there's nothing sly or nasty about any of them.

"Everybody in the audience here is my friend, though sometimes someone comes into the pub to chat me up and ask me for a date—in a nice way."

You'd never guess to look at her, but Helen has been go-going less

Arriving for work—and Helen is weighed-up by top boxer Carl Gizzi

.....go-going or.....punching—Helen's a big hit

Story Barry Edgoose: Photos Derek Rowe and Peter Austin

than a year. When she first moved to London she went to work for an insurance firm, but didn't like it. Then she took a job as a clerk-typist and liked that even less.

Next she tried her hand at being housekeeper-cum-nurse to a middle-aged man and his small son and at the same time she did some photographic modelling.

Eventually, just after her 17th birthday last November, she found herself an agent and, Hey Presto! she was a topless dancer.

It wasn't quite the realisation of a childhood ambition, for the little-girl Helen had wanted to be a ballet star and later aimed at TV.

But as it turned out she wouldn't change places now with Dame Margot Fonteyn.

TOPLESS

"I thought I would be too nervous to go topless at first," she said. "And when I first got on the stage, at a pub in Clapton, I was embarrassed and began to wonder what I'd let myself in for. Then, when I got going, it was rather good.

"Now I want to carry on dancing, modelling and maybe do some film work. I want to be somebody . . . not just a stick-in-the-mud.

"I may have a part in a film soon, but nothing's decided yet and everything must stay secret."

Two things Helen promises herself when she arrives. A trip to exotic places, because she's never been abroad. And a horse of her own.

"I love horse-riding," she said. "When I was little, friends of my family had a horse and I was always riding. I'd like to buy one of my own—one that is in need of care, one I can look after."

Apart from horse-riding, Helen likes motor-racing, going to parties, cooking exciting things (though not at her small London bed-sit) and generally living it up.

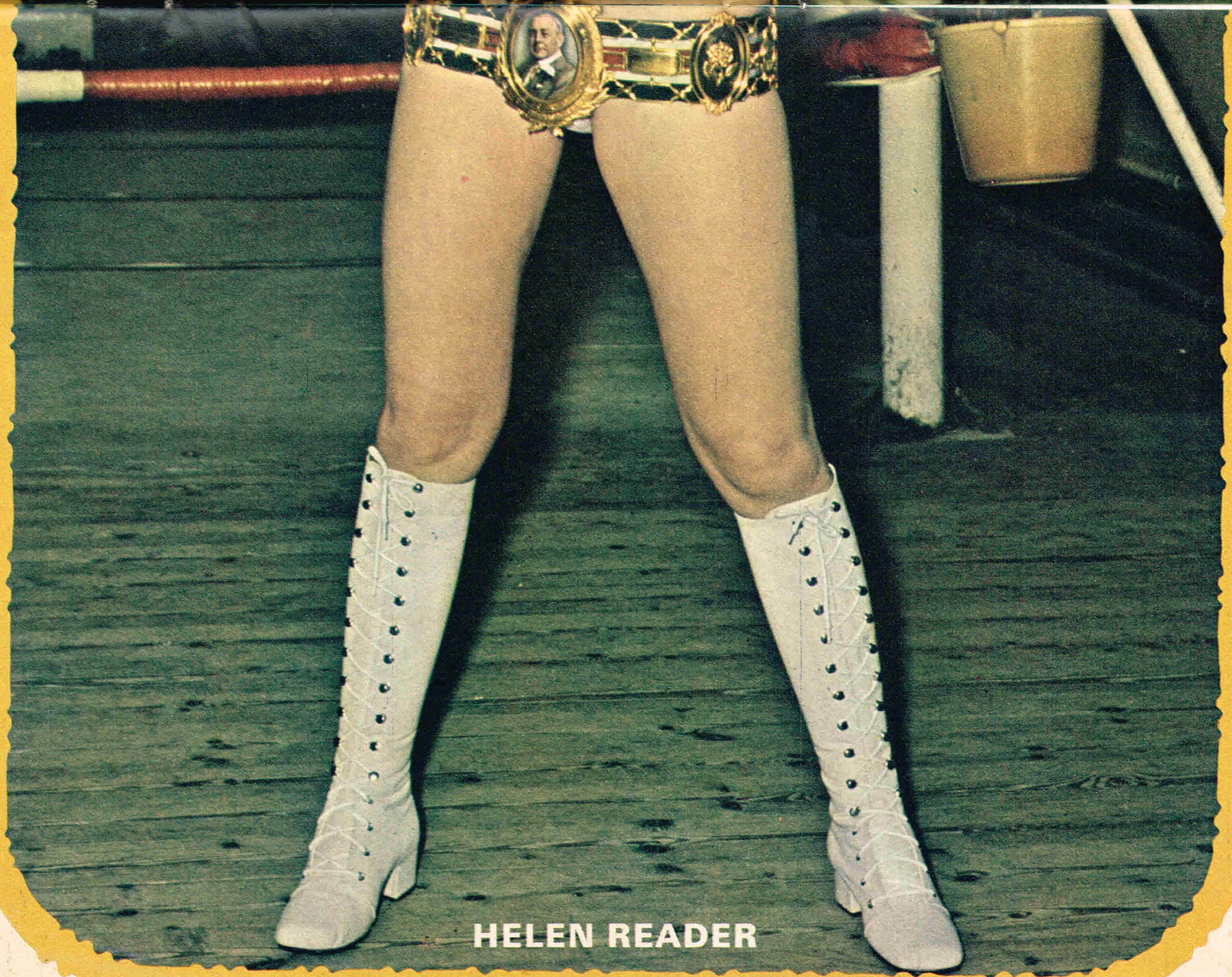
"I'm also beginning to like boxing more," she said. "Since I started to dance at the Beckett, my interest in boxing has been aroused and now I watch it on TV all I can.

"But I can't stand Cassius Clay. He's always boasting—and there's no need for it!"

"Must be for you. It's an obscene call"

. . . And for a souvenir of Helen, see over

LONSDALE


HELEN READER

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